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THE MANAGEMENT OF CAMP ALGER AND CAMP MEADE.

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THE MANAGEMENT OF CAMP ALGER AND CAMP MEADE.

HEADQUARTERS SECOND ARMY CORPS,
CAMP MEADE, PENNSYLVANIA,
CHIEF SURGEON'S OFFICE, *September 15, 1898.*

To the Editor of the New York Medical Journal:

SIR: In reply to your letter of September 6th requesting a statement of the facts relating to certain newspaper reports with regard to the condition of Camp Meade and to the health of the men in that camp, etc., I have to thank you for the opportunity given me.

While this may not benefit me with the general public, who are so ready to accept the attacks and criticisms of newspapers and personal letters which might, and no doubt were intended to, injure my professional and official standing, yet I have the satisfaction of hoping it will benefit the medical corps of the army in the estimation of the medical profession, who alone are qualified to judge.

I will preface my statement with a general history of Camps Alger and Meade, of which I was and am chief surgeon, and then take up under the several headings the main points of interest to enable the profession to judge of the management of affairs by the medical department.

I was for the greater part of the time the only regular surgeon in control of my department. One other surgeon reported to me after some time, and after doing duty in my office for a short time, I had to

send him with two raw brigades to Cuba. Another regular surgeon arrived about this time and assisted me in my office, and when I learned of confusion in the medical dapartment in Thoroughfare Gap, and of the breaking out of typhoid fever at Manassas, I had to send him there to bring order out of chaos; finally, when the affairs of the large division hospital at Dunn Loring had to be wound up after departure of most of the troops from Camp Alger, he had to step into the breach there.

The result was that I was practically the only surgeon with military training to look after the physical welfare of thirty thousand men.

The division surgeons were volunteers with no knowledge of army organization, and had to be taught by me *pari passu* with their subordinates.

Any one who knows what it means to teach raw troops how to procure food, water, fuel, clothing; to carry out ordinary principles of hygiene; in addition to this, to organize two large division hospitals, equip the hospital department of several large commands for active campaigns; to transfer, organize, clothe and equip a hospital corps of about seven hundred men, and to put them through some instruction—can guess, not realize, the Herculean task I had to perform. Add to this the introduction of a complete system of sanitation and medical organization embodied in circulars and sanitary recommendations, and he will ask himself if it is possible for one man to perform all this work. If we consider in addition to all this the discomforts of camp life, the heat of the southern summer, and the great extent of the camp, covering as it does a surface of a number of miles, it would be a matter of surprise to any disinterested observer if no mistakes were committed; and still I believe I am able to prove by documents that everything that could be done by me to preserve the health of the camp was recommended, and in all cases ordered by the commanding general.

But issuing orders and having them carried out are

two different things, and that is where the cause of sickness in Camp Alger lay. An aggregation of thirty thousand men under the drawbacks of a camp, the fatigue of the necessary military exercises and manual labor, the men barely controlled by their officers (chums and townsmen of the enlisted men), an absence of officers trained in the knowledge of and recognizing the necessity for the strictest sanitary measures, the men eating and drinking inordinately, the food poorly cooked, no one to teach the cooks or understanding the proper management of the ration, so that the men were gorging for seven days and starving for three—what else could be expected but sickness?

Since I have been the head of the sanitary department, every possible accusation instigated by sensationalism, hostility to military rule, and self-laudation, has been hurled against me.

Now what was the actual state of affairs under the different heads of medical control?

1. Medical Supplies.—A howl about the scarcity of medicines and equipments was raised soon after I reached camp. I found about ten thousand men, with a daily increase of several thousand. I knew that the surgeon general had notified the governors of the several States that it would be impossible to have adequate medical equipment provided at such short notice, and had requested them to supply their regiments with their State outfit, and I had reason to expect that the majority would come so supplied. What was my dismay, when I found an absolute insufficiency for more than a week or two, with regiments streaming in calling for ambulances to transport their sick, for medicines, for shelter, and I had nothing to give them! I had received my orders one day and was in camp the next, finding the above state of affairs. I did the only thing possible to lessen the probability of suffering by having an order issued calling in all supplies and centralizing the medical service, seizing upon the few regimental hospitals to provide tentage and equipments for all, and

taking the few regimental ambulances, in order to be able to convey the patients to the hospital and to isolate measles and mumps.

No one suffered from this except those regimental surgeons, who naturally disliked giving up what they had provided for their special commands. It was the counterpart of shipwreck or a North Pole expedition demanding an equalization of rations.

The result was, however, disastrous to me, for with newspaper reporters hungering for sensational accounts and disappointed doctors and their satellites, I was held up to the horror of mankind.

Medical supplies can not be bought like beef or oats, and it took some time before rigid economy could be relaxed, while complaints kept pouring into the papers by surgeons whose expenditures I had to keep within the lowest reasonable limits. The extravagance in the use and waste of medicines was almost incredible. But no one ever died and few suffered from lack of medical supplies.

2. Water Supply.—The next thing which not only perturbed the public mind, but even sanitarians, was the water supply. "This was a matter which should be watched!" It was ludicrous to imagine that a trained sanitary officer needed advice on the subject.

My first care the morning after I reached camp was to get an engineer and the proprietor of the camping grounds to locate the vaunted springs which had led to acceptance of the site by the quartermaster's department. I found them to be surface drainage of insufficient quantity, and at once had an order issued placing them under guard and requiring all drinking water to be boiled. The next step was the development of a sufficient and pure water supply, and to this end I accompanied the engineer officer in the selection of suitable spots to drive wells. Their average depth was a hundred and twenty feet and they passed through thick strata of rock.

Still, I took samples of the water and had them

analyzed in the laboratory of the surgeon general's office, and wherever, as in a few instances, traces of organic matter were discovered, the wells were condemned.

In order further to guard against possible contamination I obtained three hundred sets of Maignen and Berkefelt filters, and had minute orders given as to their use.

On my arrival at Camp Meade I accompanied the commanding general in an inspection of the proposed camp sites, had all so-called springs, which were only the result of subsoil drainage, at once condemned, the other sources of water supply—namely, wells driven over two hundred feet and a limestone spring and water supply of Middletown, Pennsylvania—analyzed, and found them pure.

It would tire my readers to learn about the many reports I made concerning the disregard of sanitary recommendations, but I believe that I have established the fact that while Camp Alger had an insufficient supply of water, every care was taken by me to do my share toward amplifying it.

3. Sanitary Police.—The sanitary policing of the camps was well regulated by orders issued on my recommendation, but these orders were persistently disobeyed. The privies as a rule were filthy. Sanitary inspections by regimental medical officers were either neglected, or their recommendations were disregarded by the colonels. I never learned of this disregard, as no reports were made to me by regimental, brigade, or division surgeons, in spite of daily injunctions thereon. Every one seemed satisfied with the *beauty* of his camp, but apparently no one ever looked after the dejecta. When I made personal and special inspections, matters were remedied for a day or two, and they then relapsed into the old filth. I had not the time to institute disciplinary measures.

On June 3d I had advised individual covering of fæcal matter, principally for the purpose of preventing infection by flies, and an order to that effect was

issued by the commanding general, but in the undisciplined condition of the troops this order could not be rigidly enforced until the commencement of August. Since this time a sentry was placed at each privy to see that the order was complied with, and even with this precaution instances were observed where the order was evaded. The neighboring woods and cornfields were used in preference by the men, with the natural result that most of the surface water became infected. Sentries posted to prevent the defiling of woods and cornfields would not report their comrades, and it was consequently absolutely impossible to control the situation.

4. Food.—As to the food, I recommended as early as June 3d regulations regarding it. They were speedily ignored and, as a rule, ignorance of the order was pleaded to me as excuse.

About the same time I recommended prohibition of the sale in camp of various articles of food which in my opinion were deleterious to the health of the troops. An order thereon was issued by the general, but could not be enforced, owing to limitation of his authority to within the confines of the camp.

5. Typhoid Fever.—As to the origin of typhoid fever, there were a number of foci of infection, some of which could be reached, some could not. A few examples will demonstrate this.

Soon after the occupation of the camp, cases of typhoid fever occurred, coming from a number of regiments, and the patients were removed to the general hospital at Fort Myer. They were sporadic, one or two to a thousand men, and evidently imported, because the camp had not been in existence long enough to allow the necessary time for incubation. The cases became more frequent, although the water supply, officially approved and provided, remained pure; but numbers of surface springs were all around the camps (they were more convenient than the pumps), and the men did not have to wait there for their turn, so, in spite of prohibition, this use of surface water was general.

A constant anxious search was made by me for preventable infection.

Thus it was found that a number of men of the Sixth Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, who had been on provost duty at East Falls Church and had used the water there, were taken with typhoid.

The water supply of the provost guard could not be controlled.

The First New York Cavalry, who in their camp used either boiled, Hygeia, or Apollinaris water exclusively, had a number of cases. The only explanation which could be found was that these men were constantly on patrol duty and found the cool wells in neighboring farmhouses more acceptable than the warm Hygeia water in their canteens. It is a well-known fact that many people in Washington, who spend the summer on these farms, return with typhoid.

Another source was found in a surface well driven by men of a Pennsylvania regiment in one company, which had a great many cases of typhoid, while the adjoining companies were free. Fortunately for these, the well owners guarded their well jealously. The regimental surgeons knew of it, but it apparently did not strike them as unsanitary. A company in another regiment was severely affected, while the adjoining ones were free. In that case the milk was suspected, but nothing was proved.

The fact is that if the men had confined themselves to the water provided and to the food issued, if they had practised ordinary care, and if their officers had compelled them to submit to sanitary regulations, there would have been no typhoid fever.

6. Sanitary Recommendations.—No one man in my position could overcome the indifference to sanitation. A list of the sanitary recommendations made will show to what extent my care for the health of the troops was carried:

1. Water-supply development.
2. The location of wells according to need.

3. Regulations about drinking water and the care of its supply.
4. The cooking of food.
5. The care of privies.
6. The disposal of refuse.
7. The chemical examination of water.
8. The prohibition of the sale of pies, ice cream, sandwiches, etc.
9. Recommendations for contracts with laundries, etc.
10. The employment of contract surgeons.
11. The flooring of tents.
12. The overcrowding of tents and their close proximity.
13. The establishment of urinals.
14. The purification of drinking water.
15. The removing of regiments from unhealthy locations.
16. The utilization of condemned tents for covering privies.
17. The replacing privy pits with earth closets, if the camp is to be continued.
18. The employment of cooking instructors.
19. Application for an analyst.
20. Milk inspection.
21. Detail of sanitary inspector.
22. The use of filters.
23. The change of camps.
24. The individual covering of faecal matter.
25. Detailed instructions for the use of filters.
26. Analysis of water supply.
27. The policing of grounds around hydrants.
28. Directions concerning disinfection.
29. Report about carelessness in the shipment of bread.
30. Recommendation for military excursions.
31. The sterilization of the men's blankets.
32. Reports on water supply.
33. Inspection of cleanliness of the men.
34. Raising the tent floors.

7. Selection of Camps.—Finally, as to the selection of Camp Alger as a camping ground, it must be remembered that the location was selected by the war department, and that neither myself nor the medical department in Washington was consulted. The only fault I could find was the lack of space and the scarcity of water. Both were corrected as rapidly as possible, and as soon as typhoid fever appeared other camp sites were examined, but found objectionable. Finally, it was decided to move the command to Thoroughfare Gap, and the Second Division went there; then the war department decided to move the whole command to Camp Meade.

An army corps is not like a regimental camp, and sites where all the desirable features can be found are scarce. Before Camp Meade was decided upon a large number of places were visited by officers from the war department, among whom was one of the most distinguished hygienists of the medical corps, Colonel Smart.

This paper—I should rather call it a sketch—has been written under numberless interruptions, which are inevitable in the sanitary and medical administration of thirty thousand men, and hence omissions and imperfections may reasonably be pardoned.

A. C. Girard,

Lieutenant Colonel and Chief Surgeon, Second Army Corps.

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